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b. g.

F I N G A L

K I N G O F

M O R V E N,

A

K N I G H T - E R R A N T.

Aut famam sequere, aut sibi convenientia finge.

HOR. de art. poet.

*Qui variare cupit rem prodigialiter unam,
Delphinum silvis appingit, fluctibus aprum.*

Ibid.

L O N D O N :

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J. A. G. M. I. B.



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F I N G A L

K I N G O F

M O R V E N,

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K N I G H T - E R R A N T.

S I R,

I HAVE at last perused TEMORA; and, in return to your commands, must frankly acknowledge, the more of these Galic poems, or, more properly, translations of Galic poetry, I have seen, the more am I confirmed in my former sentiments with regard to them. From their first appearance, you know, I presumed to think, that no certain or satisfying judgment could be formed with regard to their real poetic merit, till the originals are given to the public, and precisely in the form, shape, and size they bore when first collect-

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ed,

ed, before they had undergone any variation, or new arrangement whatever. This same poetic merit will, in my opinion, turn out very high, when the pieces are viewed in their proper light, and considered as that species of poetry, to which, I apprehend, they verily belong, whatever æra of composition may be assigned them.

THAT the true æra has been widely mistaken, I am still inclined to believe. These Galic poems have always appeared to me replete with ideas, sentiments, manners, customs, all along posterior to the three first centuries. If we judge by these marks, as I think we must, we shall be obliged to curtail the age of the poems by a great number of years. These marks, Sir, will bring down the æra of composition to the times of the Danish invasions; nay, even to the ages of chivalry.

PRAY, Sir, call under your review the mighty Trenmor, the first of the heroic race, with whose deeds of wonder trusty tradition has favoured us; view, I say, Trenmor in Denmark arrayed in his heavy mail of steel,
his

his scull-cap of the same solid metal, covered over with steel : cast your eye upon Lady Inibaca*, accoutred in the same knightly array : observe the hero killing the boar, sending abroad his horn, getting his choice in the combat, protecting his charming Inibaca against the love of the proud and surly Corlo : remember the first century is the time, Denmark the place, the north-west of Scotland the hero's country : cast your attention to the accounts, given by the Roman historian† of the Caledonians, their array and arms, at this very time : All these balanced, say, Sir, does Trenmor bear the greater semblance of the Caledonian hero in the latter end of the first century, or of the invincible champion, the most courteous knight, twelve centuries later ? Are these the manners, these the arms, these the knight-like achievements of the more than half-naked Caledonians in those rude and early ages ?

THE same historian‡, you know, informs us, that Agricola owed the beginning of his decisive victory over the Caledonians, who

* Fingal, b. 6.

† Tacitus.

‡ Tacitus.

were

were wanting, says he, neither in bravery nor conduct, to their total want of defensive armour, and the insufficiency of their weapons. The historian had these accounts from Agricola himself: shall we prefer the authority of our historian, or that of a Galic tradition, more than sixteen centuries old?

CAN we imagine, that Trenmor, the invincible Trenmor, Vergobret of his nation, was so very courteously, I had almost said fantastically, engaged in deeds of chivalry, on the other side of a wide tempestuous sea, at the very time the Romans, under the command of Agricola, were pushing their first conquests in Caledonia, slaughtering myriads of her bravest sons, and penning up the rest behind the Clyde and the Forth?

ONCE more, Sir, would not Trenmor, covered over with steel as he was, have been much more hero-like engaged in the defence of his country, with the immortal Galgacus, than in slaying swine in Lochlin? Why was neither Trenmor, nor any of his illustrious house, on that field of battle? Never sure did
Caledonia

Caledonia more want the aid of such invincible prowess, such solid array.

COME we now, Sir, to the great grandson of the mighty Trenmor, Fingal, I mean, first of heroes. Give, pray, what degree of attention you please to Fingal in his sentiments, manners, arms, and array: view him on every side, in his every achievement, every expedition, and pronounce as you shall see cause; Fingal the Caledonian hero, in the third century; or the invincible champion, the most courteous knight, about the 13th age.

FINGAL's first exploit, as it stands recorded in the infallible folios of Galic traditions; traditions ever venerable on account of their many years, their hoary locks! traditions of above fifteen hundred years of age, yet not impaired by years! Fingal's first exploit, according to these most venerable vouchers, was truly worthy the great and magnanimous king*.

* Fingal, book 3.

STARNO king of Denmark, at the head of a fleet and army, had dared to invade the kingdom of Morven; Fingal and his heroes vanquish him in battle, and take him prisoner. Morven's king most generously, most courteously restores the bloody invader to his ships.

FINGAL after this, some time, how long we are not told *, insidiously invited by the ungrateful, the treacherous Starno, makes his appearance at the court of Denmark. Starno intends his destruction: the lovely Agandecca becomes highly enamoured: she hints to the stranger hero her pappa's bloody design. Fingal thus warned, *keeps on his guard; keeps on his arms of steel.* Before him all Lochlin fled or died. The lifeless corse of the ill-fated Agandecca, savagely murdered by her brutal father, is by Fingal conveyed aboard his white-ailed ship, transported from Lochlin to Morven's kingdom, and there piously entombed.

FINGAL king of heroes, after this expedi-

* Fingal, book 3.

tion to Lochlin, what time intervening is not said, we find feasting and exploiting at the court of Sarno King of the Orkneys *. No tragic work here ensues, as lately at the windy-halls of Gormal. The blooming Comala is indeed no less charmed with our hero, than Agandecca had been. The royal damsel, disguised in armour like a young warrior, follows Fingal to Morven; whether aboard the King's ship, or what other, bards and traditions are equally silent. Fingal, upon his arrival in his own kingdom, discovers Lady Comala to be what she really was. Because of her beauty and romantic passion, he courteously resolves to make her his wife: very unhappily for the loving damsel, ere he could find time to carry his generous design into execution, word is brought, that Caracalla, eldest son of the great Roman Emperor Severus, at the head of a mighty army, is just about invading Caledonia. The hero flies as on the wings of thunder †, and with the resistless force of its bolt, to the defence of his country. His battalions, it would seem, were under arms, and ready to march. Instantly,

* Comala.

† Ibid.

upon his coming up, he overwhelms Caracalla and his army ; chafes them over the fields of their pride. Before the King's triumphant return, Comala is no more ; she has withdrawn to her cloud. He had left her upon a hill at some distance from the field of battle ; one of his heroes, the most malignant of men, had persuaded the unfortunate damsel, that the King had fallen by the sword of the enemy : she could brook life no longer.

THUS far, Sir, you will sustain my narrative just : and I shall as readily allow, that all this may make very good poetry ; but, in my humble opinion, a species of poetry much more strongly marked with the gigantic limbs and Gothic features of the romance, than the natural symmetry, the milder lineaments of the genuine epic muse.

SOME learned gentlemen would fain, it seems, persuade us to take all these shining exploits for real historical facts ; but as such, methinks, they can never well be admitted.

FOR is it conceivable, that Fingal, from
his

his kingdom of Morven, allowing him what time you please, could have mustered a force sufficient to defeat a Roman army, that had but a little before returned from over-running all Caledonia without battle? But should even this be supposed, the authentic history of those times interposes its negative.

THE Roman historians indeed inform us *, that Caracalla attended his father in his expedition over Caledonia, and returned with him to York; that in a short time after they had got there, accounts came, that the Mœats and Caledonians were all in uproar, and taking to arms; that, upon this piece of intelligence, Severus assembled his troops, intimated his design of their marching again into the enemies country †; and declared, his intentions were to have the barbarians chastised with the utmost rigour; but that death prevented him. These historians do not say, that Caracalla ever again returned to the Carron; they give us not the smallest ground to imagine, that he ever again fought any battle, or had any rencounter with any enemy what-

* Herodian.

† Dion.

ever, within the bounds of this island. On the contrary, they tell us, that Caracalla, during his father's last illness, was wholly employed in endeavouring to persuade the aged Emperor's physicians, and most trusted favourites, to hasten his death; that Caracalla at that time minded nothing else, but how he might effectuate his father's death, and supplant his brother Geta. And, instead of saying with the dissertator*, that the news of his father's death was brought him, after he had undertaken this expedition, when he had scarce entered the enemies country; a contemporary historian †, himself at that very time a Roman senator, informs us, that Caracalla was with his father in his last moments, and gives us the dying words of this great Emperor to his two sons, Caracalla and Geta. But, Sir, tho' we should adopt the dissertator's narrative, we cannot imagine that Caracalla returned again to the Carron: for if the news of his father's death reached him, when he had scarce entered the enemies country, he must have had these accounts just as he passed the Northumbrian wall, as on the

* Fingal.

† Dion.

north side of it immediately commenced the enemies country; all the nations of the Mæats, possessing from this wall to the friths, being no less at that time enemies than the Caledonians *. Thus, even according to the dissertator's own account of the matter, Caracalla, after his return with Severus from Caledonia, never saw the Carron nor its banks:

THIS, Sir, being the true state of the case, we must conceive Carachuil foiled and chased by Fingal on the banks of the Carron, to have been, what you know I always took him for, namely, a very fierce-faced gigantic champion, of the romantic race. By what means, arts, or powers, he came to be transformed into the son of Severus, I have never yet been able to divine. We are however told †, he was no other than Caracalla; and on this simple arbitrary assertion, utterly repugnant to the most authentic monuments ‡, have we got reared a most curious new system of history and chronology.

BUT let us proceed with our hero. Fin-

* Dion.

† Dissert. p. 8.

‡ Comala, p. 87.

gal,

gal, instead of prosecuting his unparalleled victory over Caracalla, without so much as gathering the spoils, or attempting to reap the smallest advantage to himself or his country; even after Caracalla had not only fled before him, but left the island *; Fingal, I say, never minding these matters, retreats with his army towards his capital, performs certain funeral rites to the memory of Lady Comala, cashier one of his heroes, who had been the malicious cause of the unhappy damsel's death †.

ACCORDING to our tales of the song, Fingal's next expedition was to Erin. How he cantoned, or where he encamped his victorious army, what time he took to equip his naval armament, and embark his brigades; as to these particulars bards are silent, traditions dumb. Our hero, however, gets under sail, arrives with his fleet and army in Erin ‡, where, at the palace of the great King, he is most graciously received by his own dear cousin Cormac MacConar king of all Ireland. This very cousin Cormac, say our trusty tra-

* Com.

† Caros.

‡ Temora.

ditions,

ditions, was at that time upon the point of being overwhelmed, and stript of his supreme dignity, by an inferior Irish king. This underling king was the fierce Colculla, at the head of his ferocious Firbolg tribes. With Colculla and his Firbolg our hero makes very short work: "Fingal's sword rose; Al-necma fled; Fingal returned with fame *."

OUR hero has hitherto been very unhappy in his amours. Now the charming goddess begins to smile. Roscrana, Princess-royal of Erin, falls in love with Fingal. No wonder she did: what lady, though even beyond the bloom of youth, could well avoid it? Mac-Conar gives his daughter to his cousin Fingal, who had just now saved him from the Firbolg. Roscrana conceives a son, and, in nature's due time, discloses to light from teeming womb the immortal Ossian king of bards.

AT the time Ossian was born, Fingal was eighteen years old: Ossian at the very same age had a son, whose name was Oscar. Oscar

* Temora.

was twenty years old when he acted the heroic part next to his grandfather Fingal against Cairbar.

ALL these anecdotes we are favoured with, upon the authority of a very aged, and right reverend tradition, in the last note on Temora. And according to this reckoning, Fingal turns out just fifty-six years old, at the time he slew Cairbar, and obtained his last glorious victory over the Firbolg tribes.

THIS venerable tradition, if not enfeebled by years, might pretty well sustain the probable in Fingal's last achievement, with respect to his age; the sole purpose for which it is introduced.

HERE, Sir, permit me to remark, that these our Galic traditions are a sort of two-edged weapons, and require to be wielded with great attention, and a very steady hand: for, as the probable, by this circumstance of the hero's age, is, in one point of view, well sustained in his last exploit; so, by means of this, and other circumstances, is the probable quite

quite obscured, and utterly lost in the more great and glorious achievements ascribed to Fingal before his marriage with Roscrana. This, Sir, is the place where this tradition obliges us to trace our hero's steps backwards for some paces.

PRIOR to this happy event of his marriage, Fingal had mustered an army, equipped a fleet, sailed from Morven to Erin, faced an enemy numerous and fierce, and finally gained a decisive victory, and won the triumphal spoils.

FOR all, and each of these operations, a probable allotment of time must be assigned.

FOR the most wonderful of all Fingal's wondrous victories, that, I mean, over Caracalla and his Roman army, the time taken up in preparing the means, mustering the force for carrying this immortal enterprize into execution, a probable number of days is demanded.

WHAT number of weeks intervened between
C twist

twixt the commencement of Fingal's preparations for this last signal event, and the time he feasted with Sarno in Inistore ?

How long prior to this feasting-match in Inistore, was the day when all Lochlin fled or died before our hero, at the windy-halls of Gormal ?

FROM this distinguished exploit at Gormal, how far back are we to set the time of Starno's defeat by Fingal in Morven ?

WHEN these times and intervals are assigned, we have, you know, the hero's age in each achievement, and of consequence may readily pronounce with regard to the probable in this respect. But the epic heroic muse is obliged to maintain her probable, not only in regard to her hero's age, but likewise in several other points of view ; in the means, force, and effort, by which the enterprize is finally achieved : and when the events appear grand, and thick crouded one on the back of another, the fields of action far distant, the seas stormy, navigation little understood, shipping scarce,
roads

roads not very practicable, as seems, in every particular, to have been the case in Fingal's antenuptial achievements; in such circumstances, not only a probability must be sustained in time, force, and effort, for carrying the enterprise into execution; but also a probability in time, means, and method, for transporting the hero and his force from one field of action to the other, and that in proportion to their respective distances, and difficulty of passage, &c.

THUS, Sir, as the forequoted tradition has done some service at one end; so has it, I begin to fear, done much mischief at the other; as now the heroic probable, in these most splendid exploits of Fingal's early youth, seems quite to vanish from mortal ken.

PRAY, Sir, as this is a capital article, and bids fair to ascertain the true nature and genius of our epic Galic poems, and finally to determine with regard to the species of poetry in which they ought to be ranged, let us to our attention add patience, in order to determine this important point; let us, I say, resume, and be fully explicit.

IN the beginning of the third century, Fingal King of Morven vanquished in battle, and made prisoner Starno King of Denmark, who had with a fleet and army invaded the north-west of Scotland, where Fingal then reigned.

SOME time after this, Fingal, invited by Starno, sails from the north-west of Scotland to Denmark; keeps on his armour of steel; makes all Denmark flee or die. Fingal, from this achievement in Denmark, sails back to the north-west of Scotland, buries the body of Agandecca.

FINGAL next repairs by sea, or land, or both, as you please, to the Orkneys; feasts with Sarno, who then reigned over these islands.

FROM the Orkneys, Fingal sails back to the north-west of Scotland, and somewhere thereabout raises, musters, and marches an army of his subjects, to the banks of Carron water, where with this army he defeats, and chafes Caracalla, son to the Roman Emperor Severus,

Severus, supported by a whole veteran Roman army.

FINGAL, after this victory over Caracalla and his Roman army, marches back to the north-west of Scotland, the place we do not pretend to ascertain, and there equips a fleet, transports an army to Ireland, vanquishes and kills in battle Colculla, a mighty Irish prince, supported by a numerous army.

ALL these exploits has Fingal achieved before his marriage with Roscrana; that is, by the time he was seventeen years three months old *.

IN the first exploit, besides that of the hero's age, appears an utter improbability, in every other point of view.

IT is utterly improbable, that Starno, or any other King of Denmark, in that age, possessed the means, arts, or powers of invading Britain, across the stormy intervening seas.

* Temora.

IT



It is not, with me, very probable, that the King of Lochlin, the means and powers supposed, would then have invaded the barren, desert mountains of Morven. What! can you figure, Sir, could he expect to find there? To the feast of shells he could not expect an invitation, a hostile and bloody invader as he came; he must then go a-climbing the mountains, and hunting the deer; or, instead of gathering from Morven's hills the expences of his expedition, return to Gormal, without so much as one morsel of venison for all his trouble. Nor, in this first exploit, can I discover any probability in the means, force, and effort by which it was achieved. The only probability appearing to me, is, that the bard, whoever he was, drew from the ideas of the romance; and that, in this manner, he has succeeded to a marvel, in holding up to us his beardless Fingal a romantic champion of the first magnitude in prowess as in courtesy.

IN Fingal's second achievement the same improbability evidently appears. It is utterly improbable that the Kings of Morven
were,

were, in these days, in the practice of going to Denmark, in order to feast upon invitation. It is utterly improbable they were possessed of the means and arts for such expeditions. And, after we have supposed our hero at the court of Denmark, there is the same utter improbability in the force and effort, by means of which all Lochlin fled, or died before him; nothing here to support any degree of the probable, but that Fingal kept on his arms of steel; and, unless we suppose these arms utterly enchanted, an utter improbability recurs; even though we add twenty years to our hero's age.

IN this second exploit again evidently appears mother Romance, and her invincible son the most courteous knight; a feasting-match; the affections of a young princess won; all the most mighty champions of a whole nation made to flee, or die, in a manner so marvellous; the bloody and savage tragedy of the lovely and loving damsel's death; the invincible prowess of the Galic hero, in carrying off her body, maugre all the power of Lochlin; his refined courtesy in conveying the
lifeless

lifeless corse of his unhappy mistress aboard his white-sailed ship, and transporting the same to Morven's kingdom, and there piously performing funeral rites; with me, Sir, all these bear such striking marks of the Romance and her knight, that I have always wondered how they could be mistaken.

FINGAL'S exploits third and fourth, as our traditions have coupled them together, we shall take jointly under our review.

IN Fingal's expedition to a feasting-match in the Orkneys, appear the same striking improbabilities as in that to Denmark.

IN his victory over Caracalla and the Roman army on the Carron, there is first a plain impossibility; for this very plain reason, that no Caracalla, no Roman army was at that time there: and supposing Caracalla was so impertinently officious, as to march at the head of his father's army, from the south of the Northumbrian wall to the banks of the Carron, to retard or prevent Fingal's intended match with the Princess of Inistore; an
utter

utter improbability rises to view, in the force and effort by which this immortal victory is obtained : for, according to our epic Galic muse, our hero defeats and chases a Roman general, and a veteran victorious army, in as short time, with as little effort, no adequate force appearing, — as one enchanted champion, in the romance, foils and chases his rival champion — a Fingal, a Carachuil.

AGAIN, Comala, charmed at her royal father's feast, Comala, disguised in armour as a young warriour, following her dearest charmer, the young King of Morven, across seas, friths, and mountains, from the Orkneys, to the banks of the Carron, displays to view the most genuine features of romantic chivalry.

I AM sorry, Sir, I should be obliged, in this affair of Princess Comala, to condemn our most courteous hero, as deeply deficient in point of courtesy. It was, in my humble opinion, neither courteous nor genteel, nay, nor even very manly, in Fingal, to leave the amiable loving stranger Comala, now so far from her royal father's house, on a hill at some
D distance

distance from the battle, under colour, forsooth, of a sniveling pretence, that he could not find time to marry her!—In this my hearty censure I shall, no doubt, be joined by every lady of spirit, every well-bred gentleman. For we have ground to believe, that the ritual of the Caledonian church did not, in those days, strictly require any great length of time, or extent of ceremonial form, in order to admit the Monarch to the embraces of the Lady he had chosen for his royal comfort.

THE Caledonians, you know, in these times, had their wives in common. Of this ancient practice among them, this their social disposition, this their matrimonial freedom, the smart repartee made in vindication thereof*, about this very time, by the Caledonian Lady to the Roman Empress, stands a lasting monument. Our Gallic bard, on the contrary, holds up his heroes wooing and charming their damsels; winning and espousing their dames with the very quintessence of knightly courtesy; and his ladies won by their gal-

* Dion.

lants, given in marriage by their princely fathers ; and, after their espousals, affecting a starched decency of ceremonial, and high degree of romantic decorum ; all much more resembling the more hallowed-like Galic times, posterior to the days of the good St Patrick, and holy St Colomb, than the natural naked manners, and bare-arsed behaviour of the ancient Caledonians.

DON'T you think, Sir, it is highly ominous, if not quite decisive, against the assumed antiquity of our Galic poems, that, thro' the whole of them, there is not marked, in one single instance, any of the known distinguished customs, any of the characteristical manners, arts, arms, &c. of the brave ancient Caledonians, during the very age in which our Galic bard, as is pretended, sung ? — All these has the light of Galic song quite reversed.

RETURN we now, Sir, to our probabilities. In Fingal's fifth achievement, that in Erin, there appears an utter improbability in the

means, arts, and implements for building and equipping his fleet.

IN his victory over Colculla, there is no shadow of probability in the force and effort exerted in gaining the battle, and killing the mighty hostile Prince. “On this field of action, Fingal’s sword rose, Alnecma fled, Colculla fell.”

Pray, Sir, have we here one grain of probability, but what we can pick from the occult qualities of our hero’s sword? May not FINGAL, on this occasion, be called, with some propriety, THE KNIGHT OF THE INCHANTED SWORD?

BUT, before we leave these immortal achievements of our hero’s early youth, let us throw a little of our attention towards times and circumstances.

AT the time that Severus, with the greatest Roman army Britain ever saw, is forcing his way thro’ bogs and mountains, and over-running all Caledonia; at this very time the mighty Fingal, the most invincible of Caledonian heroes,

roes, is not so much as heard of in his native land ! — he is else where ; — he is engaged in exploits more sublime ! —

FINGAL is at this time far from home, feasting, combating, charming, and, alas, burying the ladies * ! On this occasion, the most important, the most interesting to Caledonia, and all her bravest sons, we must call for Fingal King of Morven at the windy-halls of Gormal, or at the court of Sarno King of the Orkneys.

AMID such variety of exploits of Fingal's early youth, one itself, pretty remarkable, had almost escaped me. — We have it from Fingal's own mouth ; and it appears, to me however, to indicate very clearly the true species and quality of Fingal's heroism ; and, no less clearly, to display the true genius and spirit of Ossian's poetry.

FINGAL, during his war with Swaran in Ireland †, is pleased to vaunt, to his gallant grandson Oscar, the heroic deeds of his own

* Agandecca. Temora.

† Fingal, book 3.

youth.

youth. “ My arm,” says he, “ was the support of the injured, and the weak rested “ behind the lightning of my steel.” He sets before Oscar an instance of his gallant and courteous heroism. He tells him, that one day, as he returned from Cona’s heath, a white-failed boat appeared; in the boat was Fainafollis, the daughter of Craca’s King. This lady, in her white-failed boat, had fled from the Shetland islands to Morven, across the stormy intervening seas, in order to claim the protection of our most courteous, yet beardless hero, against Borbar King of Sora, in Scandinavia, her stormy and uncourteous lover.

The Lady gets on shore; declares to Fingal the cause of her coming. — Our hero most courteously undertakes her security. — “ Rest “ thou,” says he, “ behind my shield; rest “ in peace, thou beam of light!”

IN the mean time Borbár’s ship appears; “ his masts high bended o’er the sea, behind “ their sheets of snow.” Borbar’s ship comes to land. Fingal, without using any means,
friendly

friendly or hostile, for the security of the unhappy princess, not so much as interposing the promised protection of his shield, with more courtesy than true judgment, in my humble opinion, invites Borbar to partake the feast. Sora's stormy King, regardless of courteous ceremony, draws his bow. The hapless Fainafollis, King Fingal's royal ward, as she stands trembling by our hero's side, falls dead by Borbar's shaft. Fingal at last, perhaps a little too late, draws his sword; Borbar sinks beneath his mighty arm. Morven's King lays in two tombs of stone the hapless lovers of youth.

PRAY, Sir, had Fingal, do you really think, any great reason to vaunt his heroism in this exploit?

To me it has always appeared an operation hugely bungled. Our hero, on this unhappy occasion, performs not near so well as he promises. His victory over Caracalla and his ever victorious Roman army, had he been blessed with any remembrance thereof, would,
according

according to my opinion, have been a much brighter model for Oscar's imitation.

THIS odd tale, however, of Craca's sun-beam, just as we have seen it, I presume to hold up as a very striking specimen of the wildest extravagance of the romantic muse.

FINGAL, Sir, we have now viewed on all sides, in every light; — and, upon the most impartial scrutiny, have been able to discover nothing like the true epic hero: — but every the most striking mark of the romantic champion we have clearly seen; — in manners, amours, deeds of courteous chivalry; — time, place, and every attitude, in every achievement. — We have seen his exploits far above his years, in themselves more than wonderful; — in force, effort, time, place, and every circumstance, — utterly devoid of the epic heroic probable.

BUT, Sir, let us not be discouraged. — If in these tales of the times of other years, we cannot discover a probable of one kind, of another perhaps we may. For, from these Gal-
lic

lic poems, have I learned to distinguish the epic heroic muse from the epic romantic, or epic Galic.

THE epic heroic muse has, you know, her own supernatural machinery, by means of which she sustains a species of probability peculiar to her, in whatever action or incident highly marvellous she is disposed to sing.

THE epic romantic, or epic Galic muse has, in like manner, her proper supernatural machinery, spells, charms, enchantments, and many other necromantic powers; all these enter into the composition of her machinery; upborn by these, deeds she sings of highest wonder, deeds far beyond the ken of natural powers! in wonder she delights, in wonder she abounds: wonder, Sir, appears to me the very life and soul of the epic Galic muse. That she is mighty solicitous with regard to the probable, I dare not aver: yet does she maintain a species of probability, suited to her nature and genius, when not bereft of her proper machinery.

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IN the epic Galic poems under our review, nothing, it is true, of this machinery appears ; hence it is, that in them we are so much at a loss with regard to the probable.

WHAT shall we imagine, Sir, has become of our machinery ? Has it, perhaps, been withdrawn or secreted by some kind but erring hand ? Whatever may be in this, we have seen it much wanted on all our great occasions. Let us now, pray, contrast these tales of the song with the authentic history of those times, in order, if possible, to investigate the true æra of composition.

THIS new traditional system, with all the generosity of the most courteous Fingalic spirit, bestows upon the ancient Caledonians heavy mails of steel, scull-caps of the same solid metal, banners inlaid with stones and gold, and chariot-harness bright studded with gems*, &c. The Roman historians, informed by ocular evidence, roundly assert they had no such thing†. These Caledonians, say they, had no other arms than long pointles

* Temora.

† Tacitus. Dion.

swords,

words, light pikes, daggers, small targets; and instead of representing them covered over with steel, as Trenmor in Denmark, and the champions in the days of chivalry, explicitly declare *, that these Caledonians fought naked, and were utter strangers to corset or helmet of any kind whatever.

FOR this deficiency, however, on the Roman side, we have luckily hit on a remedy; we can fetch all the other heavy accoutrements, and splendid array, from the machinery of our epic Galic muse.

THE light of song, with all that romantic benignity of heart, which shines so conspicuously in the works of our royal bard, endues the Caledonians with towers †, shaded walls, stone palaces, golden arrows, shells studded with gems, and kindly indulges them in frequent feasts, carousals, tournaments.

THE ancient historians, writing of this people in the same age, on the contrary in-

* Herodian.

† Fingal.

form us*, that their habitations were no better than huts or cabins; that their viands consisted in venison, the milk and flesh of their cattle, fruits, herbs, roots, and bark of trees.

HISTORY, it is true, supplies us with one species more of Caledonian viands; which, if properly understood, with the help of a little skill in French cookery, might have been made to pass pretty well for the feast of shells.

For Solma's towers, palaces, golden arrows, &c. our machinery must again be called in aid:

OUR epic Galic muse assigns to her Caledonians, even as high as the first century, white-sailed ships; represents them as scudding over the waves of wide tempestuous seas, with more ease and less danger than what is known from experience to be the case to this very day †.

* Dion.

† Fingal.

THE light of Galic song has equipped, for them fleets, formidable armaments; established for them a constant intercourse, and current communication, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, with Denmark, and every part of Scandinavia, &c. Fingal, his sons, grandsons, heroes; all these, according to our epic Galic muse, repair, in their white-ailed dark-bosomed ships, to Carecthura, Gormal, Sora, and every place in the Scandinavian realms, with as current frequency, and with all the seeming ease, that attends the most mighty champions-errant in their movements from castle to castle, from vale to vale!

OUR heroes and those champions have operations and exploits perfectly similar, and both return from their equally romantic expeditions, equally covered over with the same romantic fame. This article of shipping and fleets in the possession of the Caledonians, in those rude, artless, and early times, appeared, you know, to me, at first sight, decisive with regard to the æra of composition.

HISTORY

HISTORY says nothing like this, gives not the least hint of the existence of one single bark, or fisher-boat, in any place all around both Caledonia, and the country of the Mœats; which, as has been observed, extended from the friths to the Northumbrian wall.

HAD there been any such thing in these nations, can we imagine the Roman historians would have omitted it? No more, it is presumed, than they would have neglected to mention their heavy armour, their mails of steel, had these appeared among the Caledonians. For the better the vanquished had been provided with the means and implements of defence, the greater glory accrued to the victors.

THIS article of shipping and fleets I deem absolutely incompatible with the known situation, circumstances, and artless state of this rude people in those times.

CAN we, Sir, figure a people that has not yet attained art, culture, or industry sufficient

cient to rear a house above a hut, to till a single acre, reap a single shock, provide themselves with coat or shoe *, at the same time building ships, equipping fleets, navigating seas, seas dangerous to modern art and improvement in sailing? A fleet of white-sailed ships, constructed and equipped by a people in such circumstances, may, methinks, be safely pronounced a rare phenomenon; or rather a real prodigy, not to be paralleled in history. But in our Galic poems, every one must observe, there is seldom any just proportion maintained in the cause to the effect.

THE single circumstance of the Roman walls, do not you think, Sir, by itself sufficient to give the negative in this article?

HAD any Caledonian prince, in the third century, been possessed of fleets, such as Fingal is fancied then to have had, these walls had nothing availed the Romans.

THE Caledonians from Cantire, or any part

* Dion.

of Argyleshire, might, in a few hours, have landed in Airshire; thus the wall betwixt the friths became of no use. Was the Caledonian disposed to stretch a little farther, he doubled the Northumbrian wall, and in consequence it was rendered equally unavailing against the invaders.

THE same reasoning must hold with respect to shipping and fleets on the east side of Caledonia: and on this side, methinks, we might naturally expect first to find them. Whether Morven's kingdom, without strong extraneous aids, could, even to this day, have produced such fleets, may, it is humbly presumed, bear a question. Whatever may be in this, it is a full hundred years after Fingal's last expedition to Ireland, before the time when we find any ground in history to believe, the Caledonians had got art enough to furnish out some corroughs sufficient to waft a parcel of the boldest of them across the Clyde below Dumbarton.

THE whole weight of this heavy article must therefore be thrown upon the supernatural

tural powers of our machinery, there to rest and remain, till the learned gentlemen patrons of our romantic tales, can find leisure to produce, within the limits of Morven's kingdom, at any time during the three first centuries, natural causes adequate to such effects.

ANOTHER consideration, Sir, I deem no less decisive against the assumed antiquity of the epic Galic poems; namely, the frequent invasions from Denmark, and wars of the sea with that nation.

IN the tales of wonder sung by our Galic muse *, we find Starno King of Denmark invading Morven with a fleet and army, much about the time Severus entered and over-run Caledonia. The bards in Comala sing, " Our delight will be in the wars of the ocean, " and our hands red in the blood of Lochlin," &c.

WE have no ground in history, as little in the nature of the thing, to believe that the Lochlinites were further advanced in cul-

* Fingal.

ture, arts, &c. during those times, than the Caledonians: in consequence, they were equally devoid of the means and powers of making invasions. Besides, historians, you know, agree in fixing the first invasion of this island from that quarter, to the latter end of the eighth century*. It was in that age Charles the Great bore very hard upon the Heathen Saxons; he compelled them to profess the Christian religion, or expelled them their country. The most obstinate in their old faith, and former way of life, withdrew northward, joined themselves with the then inhabitants of Denmark, &c. and taught them the art of bark-building, and practice of coursing by sea. Hence the æra of our poems is inferred posterior to the eighth century.

ONCE more, Sir, these Galic poems, as we have seen, are evidently replete with all the ideas of chivalry, its manners, arms, amours; replete with all the super-refined courtesy, and fantastic affectations of the romance. In all these our Galic champions superabound; Fingal in particular.

* A. D. 787.

fancies, not the smallest traces, not a single vestige, I dare affirm, can be made appear existing in the manners, ideas, or poetry of this country, anterior to the Norman conquest.

ALL these whimsical embellishments of the romantic muse, I deem to have been imported from the continent by the lordly conquerors; not all at once, perhaps, but piecemeal, and in progress of time. What number of years it might require to transplant these deemed exotics, from the south end of Britain, into the kingdom of Morven; what time more for their striking root under its bleak mountains; their growing up to perfection in this strange soil and clime; their displaying their mature and glistening fruits, mingled with the light of the Galic song: what length of time may reasonably be allowed for all and each of these happy events, I shall not presume precisely to determine. For the last shining event, if my conjecture may be sustained, I would incline to allot, at soonest, the thirteenth century.

THUS, Sir, have I ventured to curtail the
years

years of our epic Galic songs by one full thousand : and, I verily believe, for their real benefit, their truest interest. They are still abundantly aged to tread firm, when deprived of staff or hold ; still of too many years to stand steady the supporting pillars under any weight of historical structure.

IN these our poems, whatever their age may be, have we seen reversed every characteristic idea, given us by the Roman historians, of the ancient Caledonians; in manners, customs, arts, arms, and whole train of life, during the three first centuries, the very period in which our heroes are said to have acted, and our bard to have sung.

HENCE may we not, with the greatest justice, infer, that the original authors, bards, talemakers, or by whatever name they may be called, were utter strangers to Caledonia, and the most important and interesting events which happened in her very bowels during this same period ?

WHETHER the gentlemen patrons of our
Galic

Galic poems have been, in any great degree, more attentive to this period of Caledonian history, than the original authors were knowing therein, I do not presume to say; you, Sir, can better judge.

To adopt these songs and traditions for any thing like history, I would incline absolutely to refuse; and that for many reasons appearing to me very good. At present I shall confine myself to one, which is furnished by the gentleman who gave these poems to the public. He rejects, with seeming disdain, the authority of the Irish historians*; because, says he, these gentlemen are said, if not to create facts, to adopt, however, the traditions of their bards for real facts.

Is not this, Sir, precisely his own case? Has he favoured us with any one voucher for his facts, highly romantic in themselves, and repugnant to all genuine monuments, as they are; beside the traditions of his bards, reinforced indeed by other traditions, venerable,

* Fingal.

vulgar traditions, of above fifteen centuries old?

THE sneer thrown on the Irish gentlemen, I am afraid, recoils.

THAT the patrons of this new traditional history have created facts, I do not say; that they have extracted facts, huge facts, from founts, to me appears an obvious truth. Of this, Sir, I offer one shining instance. From the single word *Carac-buil*, obviously the fictitious name of a romantic champion, have they not had the art and address to extract the son of a Roman Emperor at the head of a mighty army, and also a most glorious victory gained over this Roman general, and his mighty army, *A. D.* 210, on the banks of the Carron, by FINGAL King of Morven?

F I N I S.

